

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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Facing the challenge of the world today: Preparing for trouble

Today we look at the subject of 'Preparing for trouble' which is the second of the talks in the series 'Facing the challenges of the world today'.

I must be honest and say that I did not choose to take on this subject. I suppose, naturally we would all rather not think about trouble, hoping perhaps by not thinking about it we might somehow avoid it. The verse I was given as a starting point, John 16:33, is from the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself as He was preparing His disciples for the time when He would no longer be with them. Jesus knew that He was about to be crucified, - the very reason why He came into the world was going to be witnessed in Jerusalem in the forthcoming days. In the chapters often referred to as 'the upper room ministry' (John 13-16), we have a wonderful record of the love and care of the Lord for His own whom He knew would be 'like sheep without a shepherd' (Matthew 9:36) after He had been crucified. How powerful, too, for us to have the record of these words as we live our Christian lives in a world which still rejects the Lord of glory. The verse, of course, is the last verse of chapter 16 where Jesus tells His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world" (John 16:33).

Not much doubt, then, about the fact that we are to expect tribulation! Earlier in John 15:18, Jesus had said, "If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you".

This certainly was not lost to the Apostle John as he says almost the same words in 1 John 3:13-14. Perhaps it is good to remember that if history is accurate, only John died in old age; all the other apostles were martyred for their faith in Jesus Christ.

Writing as the last of the apostles, and particularly for our day, Paul says to Timothy in 2 Timothy 3:12, "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution". It is a matter of interest that of the very few references to Christians or 'Christ's ones' in the Bible (only 3 that I know of - Acts 11:26, Acts 26:28, 1 Peter 4:16), Peter says in 1 Peter 4:14-16, "If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye ... if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed".

Well, from these verses, and there are many more which could be quoted, we see that the godly Christian should expect trouble. Our subject is "Preparing for trouble". The question for us is - How can we prepare for trouble?

Just before we try and answer that question and also to put another perspective on this subject my mind went to the words spoken in Job by his 'friend,' Eliphaz, such a very long time ago. He says in Job 5:7, "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward".

So there is an inevitability about trouble coming upon all men. I was recently speaking to a man who has had 'more than his fair share of trouble' (as we speak), who referred to it as the Adam and Eve syndrome. How true that all men (and women, too) suffer as a result of sin coming into the world. We know from Romans 6:23, "The wages of sin is death", and much of the trouble along the way is also as a result of sin. Not specific personal sins, necessarily! We must make the distinction between sin (the root) and sins (the fruit). Sin (the cause) and sins (the effect). To illustrate this, let us remind ourselves of the blind man in John 9:1-34. Here was a man who was born blind and the disciples asked the Master, "Who did sin, this man, or his parents that he was born blind?" (John 9:2) How often do we think like the disciples? Perhaps even sub-consciously we think that if we're good and live godly lives, we have a better chance of escaping trouble. Unfortunately, some of the preachers of today preach this prosperity gospel. Health, wealth and happiness - offered by coming to God. This is not Biblical teaching. This is not the teaching of the apostles or of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Neither this blind man, or his parents had sinned - causing his blindness, but that "the works of God should be manifested in him". (John 9:3)

So we need to be careful in our thoughts. If we see someone suffering today, we cannot say that it is because of their sins. This was the conclusion Job's friends arrived at in his case - but how wrong they were! In fact, Job's suffering was caused by his godly life rather than any sins he had committed. We will consider this later in our talk.

Having said all that, we do have to bear in mind that God will sometimes use troubles to refine us as Christians. Just as precious metals are heated in the flame until any impurities are removed, so God will, at times, pass us through the flame to refine us and make us more precious to Him and more useable in His service. In Hebrews 12:5 we read of the Father's chastening, "whom He loves He chastens". And although it is not a joyous experience at the time, it bears fruit in the lives of those who are exercised as a result.

So it is a complicated subject as there are several reasons why we may experience trouble in our lives. The question is can we prepare for trouble? Let us look at three men in the Old Testament to give three answers to the question.

Noah knew and believed God's word

The first man is Noah. You can read the story in Genesis 6-8, but I want to focus on the beginning of the story. The world had become such a sinful and wicked place that God was about to intervene in judgement. We can see a clear parallel in our modern world and we know that God is about to step in again in judgement. We would consider the story of Noah to be a type - that is a picture - of what is about to happen when the Lord Jesus comes in power and in judgement to this sin sick world. We have the Lord's own words in Luke 17:26, "As it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of Man". However, in the midst of a wretched world, Noah found grace (or favour) in the sight of God. God in mercy gave Noah knowledge of what was to happen and provided a plan for salvation from the flood. (1 Peter 3:20)

Remember at this point in the world's history, it had not rained so Noah showed real faith - believing God and setting about building the ark. In our younger days we sang in the Sunday School:

*Mr Noah built an ark, the people thought it such a lark.
Mr Noah pleaded so, but into the ark they would not go.*

It was hardly surprising that people thought Noah was crazy - building a boat on dry land, when it had never rained, because a flood was coming. Noah trusted in God's word. God said it; Noah believed it and his actions proved his faith in what God had said. Every day as he built the ark, it proved his trust in God's word and it was a warning to the people who dismissed his preaching of coming judgement as nonsense. In the end we know what happened, - nobody believed him and only eight souls were saved from the flood.

Perhaps Noah gives us the first answer to our question - how can we prepare for trouble? By knowing and believing in God's word. In Hebrews 6:18-19, we read that it is impossible for God to lie and this hope is as an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast.

The Lord Jesus Himself during the forty days of His testing in the desert used the Scriptures to defeat Satan and triumph over trouble. (Matthew 4:1-11, Luke 4:1-13)

Daniel prayed

The second man I want to consider is Daniel. He was a remarkable man and his story is well worth a read. Taken captive from Israel into Babylon by King Nebuchadnezzar, his desire to live his life for God would be severely tested. It would surely have been easier for him to adopt the Babylonish way of life and to fit in with the world which surrounded him. But no, Daniel was prepared to live for God in spite of the opposition he faced. There were others, too, and we can be encouraged that if we, too, seek to live for God in a world which is opposed to Him, there is fellowship to be found and enjoyed with others who call on the name of the Lord out of a pure heart. Daniel was a man of prayer. This was the secret of his power - he was in communication with the God of heaven.

He was marked by

- His 'purpose of heart';
- His 'power'; and
- He 'prospered'.

But at the centre of it all was his prayer life. We read in Daniel 6:10 that Daniel prayed three times every day to the God of heaven in his chamber with the windows open in the direction of Jerusalem. Although he was in a foreign land, far from home, his heart was still towards Jerusalem, the city of the Great King and the place where the only true God had placed His name.

After the sorry end of King Belshazzar, Darius the Mede took power in Babylon. It was during his reign that there was a conspiracy amongst those spoken of as "presidents and princes" to find fault in Daniel. (Daniel 6:4) There was quite

evidently resentment that Daniel had been given such a high position over them. This, no doubt, was made worse by the fact that he was a foreigner - a child of Israel. Daniel had such a good testimony that even his enemies could not find fault in him. They concluded that they would only be able to snare him if they could set his godly life in some way in opposition to king Darius.

If we read the story, Daniel 6:1-28, we see that the vanity of the king played into their hands and, at their suggestion, a law was passed that forbade any to pray to any God or man except to the king. As soon as the decree was signed, those who were against Daniel knew that they had their man. It certainly was not long before Daniel learned of the king's decree and the severe punishment for any who disobeyed. Anyone found to break this decree would be thrown alive into the den of lions. What was he going to do? As I thought of preparing for trouble, I almost immediately thought of Daniel's plight.

Many believers across the world are faced with similar situations today. Living under God hating rulers and regimes, they have to be very careful how they act, and often can only meet in secret with other believers. I understand that there are more persecuted Christians in the world today than at any other time. Never be deluded into thinking that believers on the Lord Jesus Christ have immunity from trouble and suffering! Whether, like Noah, the problems are physical, a natural disaster as we would call it or, like Daniel, the persecution is from a political source, we know only too well that Christians are suffering in terrible circumstances in the world today. Famine, disease, poverty, floods, earthquakes, wars, civil unrest and all manner of trouble affect believers too.

If we had been in Daniel's shoes, perhaps we may have chosen to suspend our prayer life for 30 days or perhaps we would have swapped the kneeling and open window for a walk in a quiet place away from prying eyes. It is a mark of Daniel's faith that we read in Daniel 6:10, "Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime".

What faith! What courage! And you will note that he not only prayed, he gave thanks too! We might ask how could this possibly be the case in the face of such opposition? What was there to thank God for? Perhaps in Daniel we have the second answer to our question - how can we prepare for trouble? Prayer!

You may remember, too, how the Apostle Paul and his companion, Silas, reacted to being beaten and thrown into a high security prison in Philippi. (Acts 16:25-40) In the midst of such ill treatment and injustice, they prayed and sang praises to God and the prisoners heard them. (Acts 16:25) The jailer heard them too and it was not long before he was a convert to the Lord Jesus Christ, and his household, too, were saved. (Acts 16:31-33) I believe that the patient suffering of godly believers is still a powerful voice to the unsaved today.

So Daniel was caught and although king Darius was very sorry - he was put in beside the lions. I'm sure you all know the story how that God shut the mouths of the lions and Daniel was protected. Perhaps I am a little old fashioned but I love the language of the Authorised Version: "So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he believed in his God", Daniel 6:23. In the last chapter of James' epistle, we read that "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (James 5:16). Yet we must be careful in our thoughts. God will not always deliver us out of trouble but He will carry us through our trouble according to His will.

Consider the blessed Lord in the Garden of Gethsemane. Three times He prayed to His Father that the cup might be removed from Him. (Matthew 26:39, 42, 44) Think of the agony of soul He must have been in as He anticipated what He was about to endure on the cross at Calvary. "Nevertheless not my will but thine be done". There was no thought that the Lord Jesus would be delivered out of the sufferings of Calvary. This was the will of the Father and was the work He had come to do. (John 17:4) How lovely, though, to see that the communion He enjoyed with the Father was unbroken, even on the cross. It is striking to note that the first and the last cry of the Saviour from the cross was addressed to the Father. (Luke 23:34, Luke 23:46) From John 12:27-28 we read, "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father glorify thy name".

Job trusted in God

The third man I want to consider is Job. We have already mentioned him and perhaps he suffered more than any other of the Old Testament saints. His suffering was personal. He lost everything, his wealth, his health, and his family. His friends failed him and his wife was not much help either. He was confused. He knew he was a righteous man, a man who was perfect and upright, who feared God and hated evil. God had blessed him with a wife and ten children, besides many sheep, camels and cattle and in Job 1:3 we read that he was the greatest of all the men of the east. He was a godly man who not only sacrificed for himself but in a priestly way for his family too.

We read in Job 1 how disaster followed disaster and in one day he lost all his livestock and all his children in tragic circumstances (Job 1:13-19). He acknowledged that the LORD had given, and it was the LORD, too, who had taken

away (Job 1:21). However he went on to say something which perhaps we would find very difficult, if not impossible to say in such circumstances. He said, "Blessed be the name of the LORD". (Job 1:21)

Then in Job 2:1-8 we read how he lost his health, and was smitten with boils from head to foot. What a pitiful sight he must have been, a man who was in deep distress and grieving the loss of his children. Perhaps when Job was at his lowest ebb and needed the help of his wife, she tells him to "curse God and die" (Job 2:9). Job rebuked his wife for her foolish speaking (Job 2:10).

Then his friends came on the scene with their own theories as to what was the cause of Job's troubles. Sometimes we refer to them as Job's comforters but really they were no help at all. They had no idea that Job was suffering because of his righteousness and not as a result of sin. Job questioned God. Why was this happening to him? What had he done to deserve this? He couldn't understand but he didn't stop trusting in God.

God eventually brought him through his sufferings and at the end of the book we read that he was blessed more at the end than he was at the beginning. (Job 42:12) Again he was blessed with ten children and twice as many sheep, camels and cattle than he had at the beginning. (Job 42:12-13) I think we would struggle to find a story of such personal tragedy than that of Job. Job's confidence and trust in God was what sustained him during these dreadful times. Perhaps that is the third answer to our question - how can we prepare for trouble? By having our trust in God.

Many of God's people have had to pass through dark, dark days and the trial of their faith has been proven to be more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:7). Horatio Spafford - a man who lost all four of his children in a tragic maritime disaster penned the words of the popular hymn "When peace like a river" which contains the words:

*"Whatever my lot, Thou has taught me to know,
It is well, it is well, with my soul".*

As we read the story of Job, no doubt we feel if only he knew about the conversations which were taking place between Satan and God. What a difference that would have made, but he didn't. And that's a lesson for us too. Sometimes we don't know what battles are being fought in the heavenlies. Perhaps only when we get to heaven will we fully understand the way God has worked out His will in our lives.

So in conclusion, I trust these three men have given us three answers to the question - how can we prepare for trouble?

- Noah knew and believed God's word;
- Daniel prayed; and
- Job trusted in God.

I want to leave you with the words of a well known poem:

*God has not promised skies ever blue,
Flower strewn pathways all our lives through.
God has not promised sun without rain,
Joy without sorrow, peace without pain.*

*But God has promised strength for each day
Rest for our labours, light for the way,
Grace for all trials, help from above,
Unfailing sympathy, undying love.*

"In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world". (John 16:33)

May God bless you all.

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